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UNCLAS BOGOTA 008571

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN AIRLINER HIJACKED; NEGOTIATIONS ONGOING

1. Summary. A Colombian airliner operated by Aires was hijacked today en route to Bogota from Florencia, in Caqueta Department. The twenty passengers included four U.S. contractors ) one American, two Colombians, and one Peruvian. Two Colombian Congressmen are also on board. Upon landing at Catam military airport in Bogota, the hijackers immediately released five female passengers, two children, and two female flight attendants. After negotiations with the GOC, the hijackers released additional passengers, including the four U.S. contractors. At 1600 Bogota time the two Congressmen are the only remaining hostages being held on the plane. The hijackers are believed to be father and son, and are reported to have two grenades and a bomb. They have not stated an affiliation with any terrorist organization, and reports indicate they may be former paramilitaries upset with treatment by the National Police. End summary.

2. An Aires flight en route to Bogota from Florencia, Caqueta Department, was hijacked this morning by two men, believed to be father and son. One of the men boarded the plane using a wheelchair, although it is not known if he is actually disabled or if the wheelchair was used to bring the weapons on board. The hijackers began negotiating with the GOC before landing at Catam military airport in Bogota. Carlos Franco, from the Vice President's Office of Human Rights, is the GOC's lead negotiator. The hijackers also requested to meet with a priest and a member of the Colombian Fiscalia, who are currently on board the plane. President Uribe has returned from meetings in Cali, and Minister of Defense Ospina and General Lesmez of the Air Force are currently at Catam. The two Colombian Congressmen, Luis Antonio Serrano and Reinaldo Duque, are believed to be the only remaining hostages on the plane.

3. Embassy has been monitoring the situation and is in close contact with the GOC. The Emergency Action Committee was convened (results to be reported septel), and representatives from DEA, LEGATT, and American Citizen Services are at the airport. Embassy officials have been in contact with Embassy Peru, and have spoken with high-level Colombian Ministry of Defense officials to reinforce that the plane cannot leave the ground again according to international conventions. The plan remains barricaded at the military airport.

4. The four U.S. Dyncorp hostages were released unharmed at Catam airport. They are currently being escorted back to the Embassy for de-brief by RSO.

5. Post will continue to monitor the situation and will report as details become available.

DRUCKER